# Not on file: *Engineer Highlight*


Photo by Nicole Cloutier

## Name: Nantel Suzuki

**Title:** International Space Station Operations Advisor to NASDA.

**Time at NASA:** 12 years. (Nine years as Space Shuttle Propulsion Systems flight controller, three years in current position).

**Education:** Bachelor of Science and Engineering, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Princeton University, 1988.

**Favorite music:** Just about anything by Paul Simon.

**Favorite book or movie:** Favorite book is *Siddhartha*, by Herman Hesse. Favorite movie is *Casablanca*.

**When away from JSC:** Enjoy Mexican food prepared by my wife and my mother-in-law… sabroso!

**What you like about NASA…and your job at JSC:** That the public is interested in our work and that I have an opportunity to share and discuss our work with everyone that I meet

**Background:** Nantel Suzuki has been living in Tsukuba, Japan, home of the NASDA Tsukuba Space Center, for the past three years. Although many people would have welcomed the chance to work in 'the land of the rising Sun', few would have had the genealogical connections that made it such a unique opportunity for Suzuki.

Suzuki was born in Canada and raised in the U.S. since he was 12. He is of Japanese descent and has relatives in Japan, so when the unique position opened up in the ISS program, Suzuki was quick to apply. NASDA requested NASA provide a long-term advisor in Tsukuba to help them prepare for ISS operations. Suzuki was selected and with his then-pregnant wife, Martha, and first son, departed for a two-year commitment in Japan.

The arrangement was extended an additional year and although his role was to bring NASA technical guidance and cultural perspective to NASDA managers and engineers as they worked to interpret and implement ISS regulations, Suzuki and his family have in turn absorbed the Japanese culture.

"This has turned out to be a very rich experience for the entire family," said Suzuki. "Tsukuba is a very international city within Japan so we've not only been exposed to the Japanese culture but to many others as well."

Suzuki's wife has taken up "shodo," traditional Japanese brush calligraphy, and their older son attends Yochien, a school for youngsters similar to kindergarten. Although fluent in French and English, Suzuki spoke little Japanese and read even less of the difficult "kanji" characters when he first began his tour. However, his two sons bounce from speaking English to Japanese without much hesitation.

Immersing yourself in another country, especially one as unique as Japan, comes with its challenges as well, but Suzuki says technology eased the logistical burdens tremendously.

"Living and working productively from abroad is becoming easier and easier in this information age," said Suzuki. "I've used my tour here to test the limits of remote operations, and I can say that things have definitely improved in the last three years. Of course the growth of the Internet has helped."

Despite the logistical glitches that may arise, Suzuki feels privileged to have played such a role in the space program.

"The effort put forth by NASDA and our other international partners to bridge language and cultural barriers has impressed me and motivated me to respond in kind," said Suzuki. "The other day I was sitting in on a telecon between NASDA and ESA. Here were several Japanese engineers and their ESA counterpart from Spain, and all were discussing technical requirements in English – It was quite a remarkable scene!" ■

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"I tried to make the book more personal by adding photos of people, family members and other uniquely human experiences related to the program," he said.

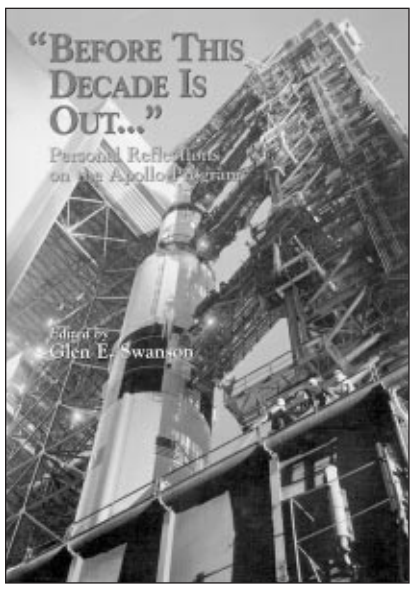
The cover photo shows the Saturn V rocket and the Vehicle Assembly Building in the background, towering above a few people who appear in the foreground.

"I picked the cover photo because for me it invokes a sense of wonderment over the absolute enormity of the project," said Swanson. "Apollo was an enormous effort that wove both hardware and people together into one amazing tapestry. I think the photograph blends the two elements together quite well. In writing about the Apollo Program, the 'machine' is often depicted as overshadowing the 'man' because it was such a perfect example of our nation's technological virtuosity for that time period. But we shouldn't forget that at the core of the program were the people, their accomplishments and reflections, which is what I tried to capture in this book. These are the people's stories, and it was through their achievements that the program was made possible."

In editing the transcripts, Swanson found that people's accounts of particular occurrences vary. He says that accounts of events vary based on how people remember them or how they want them to be remembered. So in reading the book the reader may encounter the same event told from differing perspectives. "The historian has to consider every angle of an event and not just take one person's account as absolute fact," Swanson said.

Although accounts of events may differ, most of the people interviewed agreed that it was a wonderful time to be alive and all were excited to have been a part of the Apollo Program.

"People were extremely proud to be able to work on the Apollo Program," said Swanson. "Time went by very fast, and for most, they did not have an opportunity to step back and put into perspective the history making events of the period. They knew that what they were doing was important and that somehow it would be remembered, but many regretted not being able to take the time to just soak it all in. By giving us their oral histories, for many, this offers them the first real opportunity to preserve their role in history from their own perspective."




Many of those interviewed for the JSC Oral History Project said that Apollo 8 was the highlight of the program and their career.

"Going to the Moon after only two unmanned missions of the Saturn V made a lot of people very nervous," said Swanson. "If Apollo 8 had not been a success, we probably would not have made it to the Moon by the end of the decade."

Swanson believes that receiving the Pendleton Prize for his book says a lot about the role oral history plays in historical research. "I think the award says a lot about the Oral History Project and oral history in general. Typically among historians, oral histories aren't regarded as good primary source material because oftentimes they are not considered to be an accurate representation of events. But I'm of the opinion that oral histories serve as a valuable reference tool and, like any other reference, should be checked and rechecked for accuracy. In addition, oral histories may open doors to additional resources that otherwise may not have been considered if not having been first mentioned by the interviewee during the course of their oral history."

"'Before This Decade Is Out': Personal Reflections on the Apollo Program" was published in October 1999. Looking ahead, Swanson foresees writing books on the history of the Space Shuttle Program and the X-38.

For now, the JSC historian, whose duties have expanded to covering all aspects of history related to the center, is occupied with trying to establish a formal history function at the center and managing its historical collections. "The center has been without a historian and formal history function for nearly 10 years," said Swanson, "and, as a result, there is a tremendous backlog of work to be done in getting this invaluable historical resource up and running again for use."

The Pendleton Prize is given to an individual author or to principal collaborators for an outstanding major publication on the federal government's history produced by or for a federal history program. Awards are given to narrative histories, edited collections of articles or essays, or any other published historical work of comparable scope. Entries are judged for value in furthering the understanding and history of the federal government, quality and thoroughness of research, style and appropriateness of presentation, suitability and rigor of methodology, and use of original and primary materials.

The Pendleton Prize has the additional requirement that the publication nominated must have been produced by a federal historian(s) or for a federal history program, including history offices in the federal agencies and history-related programs in other federal entities. Finally, the nominated work must have been published in the calendar year immediately preceding the spring awards.

The Pendleton Prize commemorates Ohio Senator George H. Pendleton, sponsor of the 1883 Civil Service Reform Act that bears his name. This is the second year that this prize has been awarded. This prize was first awarded in 1998 to Robert J. Watson for "Into the Missile Age, 1956-1960" which was published by the History Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Swanson received the award on March 16 during the Society for History in the Federal Government's annual spring meeting held this year at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. ■

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Copies of the book may be purchased at the JSC gift shops or online through the Government Printing Office Web page at: http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/gpo/order.html